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# MISSISSIPPI COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

## *POSITIVE OUTCOMES*

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Issue No. 23

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### **COMMUNITY SUCCESS STORIES IN MISSISSIPPI**

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#### **CDD Mission Statement:**

"The Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities is a body of advocates, appointed by the Governor, who promote quality of life for people with developmental disabilities, their families, and the community at large. Improvement in quality of life is provided through initiatives that have potential for replication, thus creating systemic change."

#### **About this issue...**

**By: Mr. Ed Butler, Executive Director**  
**Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities**

It is becoming increasingly recognized that the need for a better trained direct care workforce is the key for people with significant developmental disabilities to truly become participating members of their community. The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-402) encourages each state Council on Developmental Disabilities to develop creative strategies to recruit, train and retain direct support staff who work with people with disabilities. The MS CDD responded with an initiative through the Arc of Mississippi. Read on...

#### **Hudspeth Regional Center**

**By: Dr. Don Myers, Director of Staff Development**

Hudspeth Regional Center was happy to be selected as one of three sites in Mississippi to serve as a pilot training center for Direct Support Professionals through the Direct Support Professional Opportunity grant, funded by the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities. We currently have 45 individuals in the direct service field enrolled in the training program. These employees represent all areas of Hudspeth Center's campus and community service programs. There is a lot of enthusiasm among the learners; they realize that the internet-based program through the College of Direct Support has up-to-date best practices information in their field. Many have said the lessons have reinforced things they already knew and have presented new and challenging ideas to help

those better serve individuals in their care.

We initially thought we might have problems getting people to sign up for the program, but this was not the case. Hudspeth Center established 5 criteria for enrollment in the program, the first and most important one being a desire to increase one's knowledge base in the field of developmental disabilities. The others are; strictly voluntary basis, a minimum of 6 months employment at HRC, job classification of DCS, DCS-A, DCAS, DCS, or VTI, and very minimal exposure to computer usage, although this one could be waived with a strong desire to participate. We initially offered 4 modules from the program: Direct Support Professionalism; Community Inclusion; You've Got a Friend, Supporting Family Connections; and Maltreatment of Vulnerable Adults and Children. Some of our learners completed these modules within only a few weeks and Lisa Burck of the Arc is in the process of adding the next 8 available modules.

Everyone at Hudspeth Center has high expectations of the DSP Opportunity Grant. We expect the project to raise awareness of the need for highly qualified Direct Support Professionals and lift the field of Direct Support to a new level of Professionalism. We are hopeful that the grant will help to create a state-wide DSP Organization, address recruitment and retention efforts, and develop a system of licensure, career ladder, and pay incentives for this very important segment of our service delivery system.

#### **The College of Direct Support ...**

*An American Curriculum for Direct Care Professionals*

**By: Mr. Bill Tapp**

The College of Direct Support exists to meet the growing demands and challenges in the world of direct care. As new options for community based living increase, so do the demands and skill sets of those men and women who provide the critical supports needed to live life in the community. It is the vision of the College of Direct Support to help grow the **Capacity** of our service delivery system in order to provide **Choice** in the lives of those we seek to serve.

The web-based national curriculum is a collaborative effort of The University of Minnesota's

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Center on Community Integration, The Administration on Developmental Disabilities, MC Strategies and Sertoma Center's MyLife Foundation. It is the mission of the CDS to provide a contemporary gateway for best practices in the field of direct care. By using web based, Internet learning, developed via a nationally recognized curriculum, the CDS provides contemporary best practices for the support of direct care workers in America.

The Arc of Mississippi and the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities are to be commended for their collaboration of a demonstration project for direct care workers in the state. Since the inception of the project over 102 learners have experienced more than 2,164 lessons! The Mississippi team lead by Matt Nalker, Lisa Burck and Mike Montgomery are doing great work in introducing the CDS to the MS workforce.

Based on the [Community Supports Skills Standards](#) developed by the Department of Health & Human Services, the CDS is being created in three major learning areas. The core curriculum embraces 11 Courses including: Safety in the Home & Community, Maltreatment of Vulnerable Adults & Children, Supporting Healthy Lives, Individuals Rights & Choice, Positive Behavior Supports, Documentation, Community Inclusion, You've Got a Friend, Direct Support Professionalism, Introduction to Developmental Disabilities and Teaching People with Developmental Disabilities. The courses/Lessons are built on nationally validated competencies and ethical guidelines including the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals Code of Ethics. Intermediate Course offerings will include topics such as Cultural Competency, Administration and use of Medications, Civil Rights & Advocacy and Person Centered Planning. The Advanced learning is being developed to include topics such as: First Aid, Counseling Skills, Self-Determination, Food Selection & Preparation, etc. Today, a learner can advance from a Certificate of Completion to CEU's and if desired, college credit programs offered by The University of Minnesota.

The College of Direct Support has just passed its first full year of service. We are pleased that over 20 states and numerous agencies across our county are embracing this learning experience. These states have recognized the need for a trained, paid and celebrated workforce and the need for change in the way we support those who do the real work of enhancing lives. A sampling of those involved includes: Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Illinois, Kansas, the District of Columbia, Wyoming, SPIN, Heritage Christian Services, ResCare, Tennessee MicroBoards, and Virginia.

We invited you to explore the College of Direct Support at: [www.collegeofdirectsupport.com](http://www.collegeofdirectsupport.com) at the site you will find a Demo as well as a complete course and

its supporting lessons. You are also invited to view The College of Frontline Supervision at: [www.rtc.umn.edu/cfs](http://www.rtc.umn.edu/cfs) The CFS will become an offering of the CDS following its national testing in 2005.

The College of Direct Support stands as a tool to help provide meaningful learning that supports a profession. The work of a direct care professional truly matters most in the lives of others. It is our responsibility and privilege to support them. The entire CDS team applauds the efforts of the Arc of Mississippi and the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities for their work in raising the standard of career based education for the workforce. We look forward to making the CDS a part of the training for every direct care professional in your great state.

## Comments from a Direct Support Professional...

**By: Mr. Bill Adams, Direct Support Professional  
Millcreek Community Services**

I think the website is very convenient because you can access it from any computer twenty-four hours a day. The website pages are laid out so that they are easy to read and maneuver. The website has a lot of helpful information that can be used everyday in my job as a direct support professional. For example, it shows you the correct way to do documentation, purpose of documentation, effective documentation, fire safety, and responding to emergencies. Another thing that was helpful to me is the website lists your grades and shows what lessons you have completed up to that date.

After working in this field myself for three years I would recommend this course to anyone planning to work with individuals with special needs.

## To the Council on Developmental Disabilities...

**By: Mr. James Rankin, DSP  
Hudspeth Regional Center, Kosciusko Group Home**

The courses offered through The College of Direct Support have been very easy to understand and read. The courses provide informative materials which help the learner provide methods and ways to help individuals with developmental disabilities. The courses teach topics such as: Safety at Home, Vulnerable Adults, Individual Rights and Choices and many other subjects that DSP's face today. The lessons provide a good example from other DSP's who work with developmental disabilities. Being able to work at home on the courses on your own time and pace was a great idea. The reason I like taking the courses at my own pace is because I like being able to finish a lesson when I want to and not having to wait on other people. The

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College of Direct Support will help educate and change the lives of the DSP's and the people they assist. I would like to thank the Council on Developmental Disabilities for funding the program and I hope you give other Direct Support Professionals the chance to learn about developmental disabilities.

## Great Things Happening in Mississippi..

By: Ms. Lisa Burck

DSPO Project Director, Arc of MS

Mississippi is in the right place at the right time for sweeping changes that are taking place nationally in the area of direct support to people with developmental disabilities. There have been a number of challenges in our service delivery system with opportunities to improve the way we support individuals in our state.

The essence of the problem is that the position of direct support professional (a term that will hopefully replace the term "direct care worker") has been a job, not a profession. Here's what I mean:

### A JOB:

- \* Gets the bills paid
- \* Is always entry level
- \* May or may not be where you work in six months
- \* Anybody can do it

### A PROFESSION:

- \* Is a career
- \* Means that you're an expert
- \* Your employer may change but you still work in the same field, it's what you

The Arc of Mississippi has been working very hard to help Mississippi be a part of the good things that are happening all across the Nation. Through the Council on Developmental Disabilities, funding is provided for a pilot project to discover and implement a curriculum to provide the training and a system to get the training to all of the individuals that need it; those already on the job and those who want to become a direct support professional.

Specific professions have characteristics and policies that are unique to their field. Doctors have the American Medical Association. They have a set of guidelines for competency and a Code of Ethics. So do teachers, lawyers, and other professionals and paraprofessionals. A National Code of Ethics as well as a Community Support Skill Standards has recently been developed for direct support professionals. There is now the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals with a state chapter coming soon. Certification and accreditation are being developed in the near future. Conferences and other learning and team building opportunities are coming together. **And, for Mississippi, there is the College of Direct Support.**

The College of Direct Support is an on-line distance learning curriculum that was chosen by Mississippi after looking at many options. Twenty states are currently using the College of Direct Support in some fashion. It is cutting edge, best practice training that is relevant to today's DSP and which promotes respect, choice, and dignity in all that we do. We have begun a pilot project to offer this training to some of the direct support professionals in Mississippi. Three pilot sites and well as other individual learners are currently students with the College of Direct Support. South Mississippi Regional Center, Hudspeth Regional Center, and Millcreek Community Services have all embraced the opportunity to access this training resource. Currently, 102 learners have 24/7 access to lessons such as; community inclusion, professionalism, positive behavior support, and others. Twelve courses are available with more coming on line as they are developed. A team of Stakeholders guides and directs the project. Plans are underway to further develop opportunities so that everyone will have access to learning and eventual certification.

If you are a direct support professional who is interested in enrolling in the course or are an administrator who wants to discuss training for all of your staff please call me at 866/497-1035 or e-mail at lisaburck@bellsouth.net and I can tell you what it takes to get started. It's easy to access and convenient. The increased level of knowledge and skill and the confidence in ability make this opportunity very rewarding.

## ***Good Staff, Bad Staff, No Staff at All:***

### ***Advice from Two Consumers***

By: Mr. Jim Beaty and Mr. Nathan Perry

*Jim Beaty and Nathan Perry are two consumers of the services provided by direct support professionals in the community. \* When asked to describe the impact of direct service workforce development on their lives, they shared the following thoughts.*

To us it is really simple – if agencies have good staff, we have good lives. If agencies have bad staff that aren't trained, don't understand our disabilities or have attitude problems, we suffer the effects.

We've been through the system, that's for sure! Institutions, group homes, special education, supported living, workshops, real jobs and semi-independent living. We've had more staff than we can count some good and some bad. But, most of them have been really caring and nice.

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To us good staff:

- Are supportive and try hard to understand our problems.
- Have creative ideas to help us resolve our anger and control our own behavior.
- Know about our disabilities and understand the things that are out of our control.
- Try to understand where we are coming from.
- Don't hold grudges.
- Are there for us when we need them.
- Are loyal, honest, and respectful.
- Don't see their job as "just a job" but as an opportunity to help people fit into society.
- Go out of their way for us.
- Are trustworthy.

It really affects us when a staff person is hired and leave. When there is not enough staff to work with us it means that we sit around and are bored. It makes us feel like we are put on the back burner and neglected because there is no one there to help us with our shopping, banking, bills, solving problems, or doing stuff in the community.

There is a lot of past staff that we really like, but haven't seen in years and really miss. It seems like we just get to know them and then they give up on us and quit. Then we have to start all over. Sometimes it makes us feel violated because they say they really care and are interested in our lives, but then they leave.

Also, **it is important for staff to be trained** and to understand us as people and our specific disabilities. If staff doesn't understand Tourettes or Autism, there is no way they can understand us and provide the supports we need to live successfully in the community.

We think it is really important that agencies and the government do whatever they can to help people with disabilities find staff that understand us, want to work for us, and are willing to stick by us. We also think our staff needs to get paid more money and also be respected by people in society.

*\* Jim Beaty is a consumer and self-advocate who lives in Indiana, and Nathan Perry is a consumer and self-advocate who lives in Minnesota.*

(Reprinted with permission from **IMPACT newsletter, The College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota. Volume 10 • Number 4 • Winter 1998.**)

## OHIO PATHS WINS MOVING MOUNTAINS AWARD...

August 20, 2004 Amy Gerowitz

PATHS, Ohio's voluntary credentialing project for direct support professionals was awarded the Moving Mountains Award at The Reinventing Quality

Conference in Philadelphia on August 10, 2004. The award is presented by The National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals and The Research and Training Center of the University of Minnesota for excellence in **Direct Support Professional Empowerment and Career Development through Apprenticeship and Credentialing.**

PATHS began in January, 2001 with a dream to create a statewide, sustainable voluntary credentialing program for direct support professionals in Ohio. PATHS received ongoing financial support from The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Planning Council and additional support from The Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities and The Ohio State Apprenticeship Council.

PATHS is a system wide change effort, it offers front line workers, the best in educational practice grounded in a strong person focused philosophy of supports. PATHS brought together providers, individuals with disabilities, family members, DSPs, state and county representatives, advocates and educational professionals to create a rigorous and effective voluntary credentialing program.

PATHS was initially implemented in three pilot regions throughout Ohio and in 2004 a fourth region in West Central Ohio will begin offering courses. In 2003, 32 agencies participated and 48 DSPs were awarded The Certificate of Initial Proficiency (CIP) and 36 skills mentors received the Certificate of Advanced Proficiency (CAP). A second round of CIP candidates has completed coursework are finalizing their portfolios right now. In the fall of 2004, courses in the CAP will be offered in Cincinnati, Toledo and Cleveland.

Comments from candidates, their organizations and supervisors tell the story of PATHS. Marianne Taylor conducted interviews of candidates during her visits to pilot sites. The results of their interviews show greater confidence in themselves and greater understanding of their roles with the people they support.

- *I changed a lot of what I do (man with 23 years experience) I realized I was unintentionally shortchanging people – now I give eye contact, take the extra time to nurture – gives me a greater appreciation for folks.*
- *How to be neutral and help people make their own choices.*
- *Learning to listen again.*

These are just a small sample of comments by participants. Organizations have seen changes as well. They report greater interest in skill mentoring, increased teamwork, changes in staffing patterns and revised evaluations and training practices. (Marianne Taylor,



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Ohio PATHS Interim Evaluation Report)

PATHS is on the road to becoming a sustainable program. PATHS is engaged in ongoing dialogue with The Ohio Department of MR/DD, County Boards of MR/DD, community colleges, foundations and The Department of Labor to mention a few.

On a personal note, in my 25 years of working in this field, OHIO PATHS represents the most important and best work that I've ever been fortunate enough to be part of. It offers the potential of making long term changes in the way we think about, train and plan for the front line workforce of the future. You can contact me for more information about PATHS at [agerowitz@outlooks.us](mailto:agerowitz@outlooks.us).

## Federal Government Recognizes Growing Crisis in DSP Wages...

**By: Ms. Lisa Burck**

The Arc of the United States ([www.THEARC.org](http://www.THEARC.org)) and the American Network of Community Options and Resources ([www.ANCOR.org](http://www.ANCOR.org)) and United Cerebral Palsy ([www.UCP.org](http://www.UCP.org)) have all applauded Representatives Lee Terry (R-NE) and Lois Capps (D-CA) for introduction of the Direct Support Professional Fairness and Security Act, H.R. 5197.

For millions of people with disabilities of all ages, direct support professionals are the key to living successfully in their home communities. Yet the supply of direct support professionals to provide supports is in crisis. Many workers find that they can earn higher hourly wages and receive better benefits, in far less demanding jobs. As a result, people with disabilities experience continuous turnover of direct support workers who assist them with their personal daily needs or they find themselves unable to get workers at all.

Representatives Lee Terry and Lois Capps introduced H.R. 5197, a bill to address the crises in those programs funded by the federal/state Medicaid program. The Direct Support Professionals Fairness and Security Act will take bold steps in ensuring that direct support professionals are paid wages and benefits that enable them to stay in their jobs and provide the critical services that people with disabilities rely upon. All three associations commend Representatives Terry and Capps for their leadership and commitment to ensuring that our family members with disabilities are not made more vulnerable by the failure of the system to pay direct support professionals a decent wage with critical health care and other benefits. The ANCOR web site has a link to your congressman so that you can tell him/her of your support for this bill.

**(Reprint from Arc and ANCOR news)**

## A New Era for Citizens with Disabilities

**By: Mr. Mike Montgomery  
Special Project Director, Arc**

The Direct Support Professional Opportunity Project (DSPO) offers the following outcomes: 1.) direct support professionals have a way to access and keep up with best or positive practices in the field of developmental disabilities and 2.) the service system in Mississippi will gain a workforce capable of increasing desired and meaningful outcomes for its customers. These outcomes won't happen overnight. At this point many direct support professionals have begun taking the online curriculum previously discussed in this newsletter. Some have already started giving feedback and evaluating the courses. Direct support professionals will begin to implement new activities with customers they support which relate to the content of the lesson. Customers will be asked to evaluate the activities to insure that the activities are customer driven and done in a satisfactory manner.

The stakeholders for the project will begin to establish a career ladder and requirements for advancement as milestones are achieved. A DSPO organization will be started as a part of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals. Members will be eligible to receive the newsletter and participate in conferences. Direct care workers will truly become Direct Support Professionals in every sense of the phrase!

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Careers**

*"Just as the concept of "normalization" revolutionized the field of services and support to people with cognitive, intellectual and developmental disabilities, the College of Direct Support is revolutionizing how Direct Support Professionals are trained, supported and assisted to grow. The College of Direct Support makes it possible in every part of the United States to receive leading edge training and opportunities for personal growth and development."*

**-Steve Eidelman, Executive Director  
The Arc of the United States**

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**The Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities is funded through the Administration on Developmental Disabilities, 370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W., HHH 300-F Washington, D.C., 20447.**

**The Designated State Agency for the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities is the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Bureau of Mental Retardation.**

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